BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

ACHIEVEBC
BRINGING OUT THE BEST

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2008AE0005-000098
Jan. 25, 2008

Ministry of Advanced Education

$310K WILL BUILD ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE AT CNC

FORT ST. JAMES – The Province is providing the College of New Caledonia with $310,000 to build a gathering place in Fort St. James that will enhance support services for the growing number of young Aboriginal students on campus, MLA John Rustad announced today.

"With an aging work force and a growing need for skilled workers in British Columbia, our government believes we need to look to under-utilized labour pools to fill the void left by retirements," said Rustad, who represents Prince George-Omineca. "By providing appropriate supports for First Nations at CNC, we can help them complete their education and transition into jobs."

Up to $15 million will be provided for Aboriginal gathering places at public post-secondary institutions over the next three years. Besides the College of New Caledonia, the first round of funding includes Okanagan College, Kwantlen University College, the College of the Rockies, Langara College and Northern Lights College. The funding is part of the Province's $65-million strategy to help Aboriginal students start, stay in and succeed in post-secondary education.

"We are breaking down the barriers that have prevented so many of our Aboriginal people from being all they can be," Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell said. "At the same time, we're helping our province meet skills shortages by making sure the growing number of young Aboriginal people in B.C. have the knowledge and skills to build great careers."

Aboriginal people are the College of New Caledonia's fastest-growing student group. At the college's Fort St. James campus, 65 per cent of students are First Nations, according to CNC statistics. Most come from surrounding Aboriginal communities and First Nations, including the Nak'azdli Band, Takla Lake First Nation, Tl'azt'en Nation and Yekooche First Nation.

The college will use the gathering place funding to provide a café-style place for Aboriginal students and other community members. It will contain a cooking area and will be close to the student lounge, resource centre and multi-station Internet lab.

"The college is committed to providing accessible education and training opportunities for all its students, and this funding will help us offer a place where Aboriginal students will feel at home," said John Bowman, president of the College of New Caledonia. "A gathering place at our Fort St. James campus is an important step in encouraging more Aboriginal students to gain the skills needed in that community, now and in the future."

-more-

More than 17,200 First Nation, Métis and Inuit students attended B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions in 2007, an increase of more than 16 per cent since 2002. However, according to B.C. Statistics, a non-Aboriginal person is five times as likely to have a university degree as an Aboriginal person living on reserve, and almost three times more likely than an Aboriginal person off reserve.

Improving quality and choice in education is a key pillar of the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda. The gathering places funding also supports the government's commitments through the Transformative Change Accord and the Métis Nation Relationship Accord to close the gaps by 2015 in education, health, housing, and economic opportunities that separate Aboriginal British Columbians from other residents.

-30-

Media contact: Gordon Williams
Communications Director
250 952-6508
250 413-7316 (cell)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.